

## Lenten Teaching – Transgressions: Effects of Climate Change and Biblical Teachings

A previous Lenten teaching asserts that climate change is a religious issue for Christians and Jews, as well as an environmental one, because some of its effects are contrary to biblical teachings. That is, since our actions (e.g., the burning of fossil fuels which sends greenhouse gases into the atmosphere) result in climate change, we bear responsibility for its effects.

We find one of those conflicting effects early in Genesis, with the Noah episode. In Genesis 6: 19-20, God instructs Noah saying:

And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.

Notice the phrases “. . . to keep them alive with you” and “. . . two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.” God instructed man, Noah, to keep every species alive.

A message we take away from these passages is that if God wanted to keep every species alive, then human actions must also seek to save all species. In contrast, climate change that humans have brought about imperils numerous species. These include: polar bear; grizzly bear; Elkhorn coral; bull trout; and Pacific salmon. In addition, the magazine *Audubon* reported (March-April 2014) that 314 species of North American birds are at risk of extinction from climate change.

This provides one example of how an effect of climate change is contrary to biblical teachings.

A second example comes from our diminishing adherence to the instructions to take care of the needy and the stranger. In Matthew 25, we find two familiar statements of Jesus:

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. [Matt. 25: 40]

Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. [Matt. 25:45]

These verses represent, to me, a beautiful synthesis of the multiple instructions in Leviticus that clarify how we are to harvest the crops that come from the land owned by God.:

Indeed, the whole earth is mine. [Exod. 19:5]

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. [Psalm 24]

For example, we read in Leviticus 23:22:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the LORD your God.

In Leviticus, we find that God makes a deal: though the land belongs to God, we may grow our crops and obtain our food *under the condition* that we take care of the needy and the stranger. But the changes in the climate that result from our actions are diminishing our ability, and certainly our willingness, to do that: the increasing global population coupled with the extended periods of drought on some parts of the planet and the torrential rains experienced on other parts result in a diminishing food supply per person. In addition, the melting of glaciers and the evaporation resulting from high temperatures decreases our water supply.

Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. [Matt. 25:45]

Thus, the Noah episode in Genesis 6-9, and the instructions in Leviticus 19 and Matthew 25 serve as just a few of the foundational biblical teachings that cast climate change as a religious, as well as an environmental, issue.

Action: Consider whether you accept the two examples in the Lenten teaching above (preserving all species; taking care of the needy and the stranger). If you see some validity in each example, what actions might you take that follow religious teachings? If you see either example as flawed, write down your analysis. Then review your critique several days later within the Lenten season.

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